

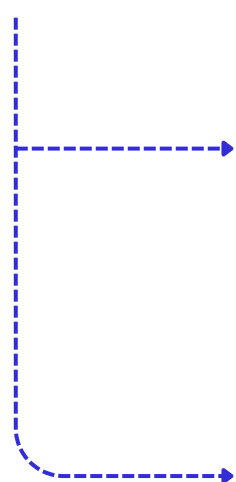
Is there a decline of *imagination?*

And if so:

- What is social imagination?
- Why does it matter?
- Why is it declining?
- Who can revive it?
- How to fuel imagination?
- Where to start?



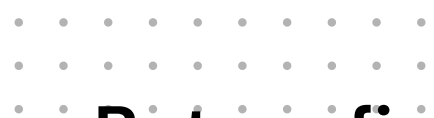
We find it *easy* to imagine apocalypse and disaster or to imagine new generations of technology.



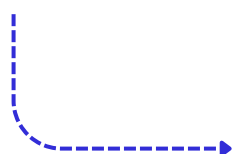
Utopian and dystopian novels construct entirely new physical worlds and often reimagine social structures.



Smart technology excites yet unsettles us all, be it AI, quantum computing, or augmented reality.



But we find it much *harder* than before to imagine a better society a generation or more into the future.



What might our care or education systems, welfare, workplaces, democracy, or neighbourhoods be like in 30–40 years?

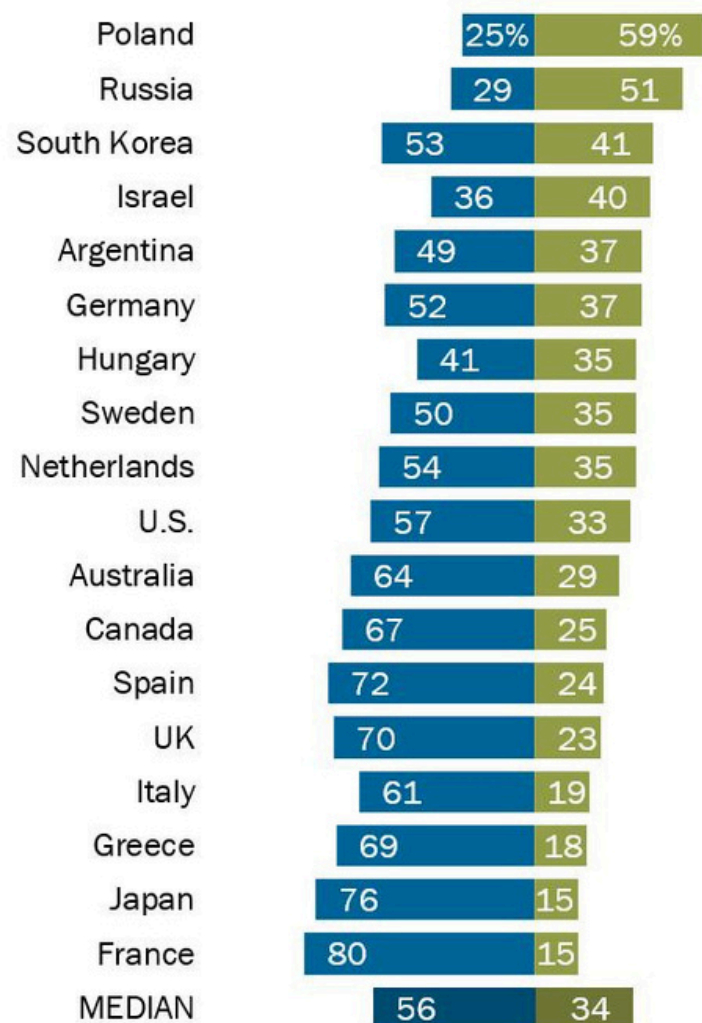


Is there a decline of imagination?

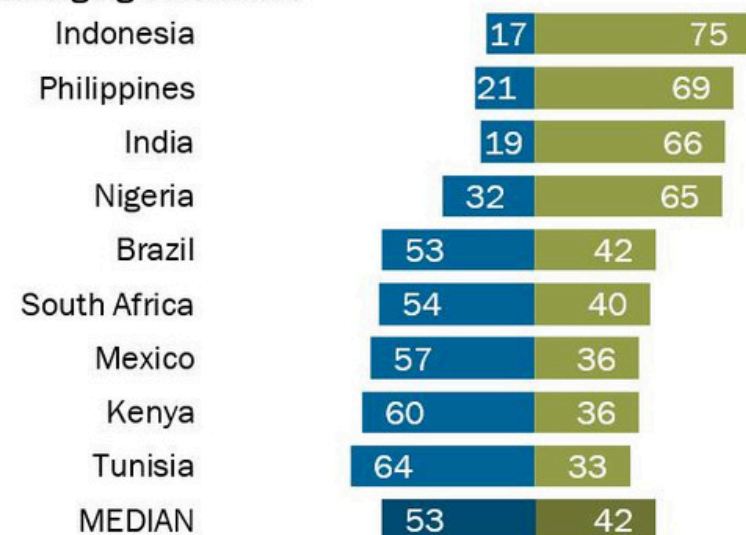
Pessimism about children's future is widespread in most economies

When children today in our country grow up they will be ___ financially than their parents

Advanced economies **Worse off** **Better off**



Emerging economies



Source: Spring 2018 Global Attitudes Survey, Q3.

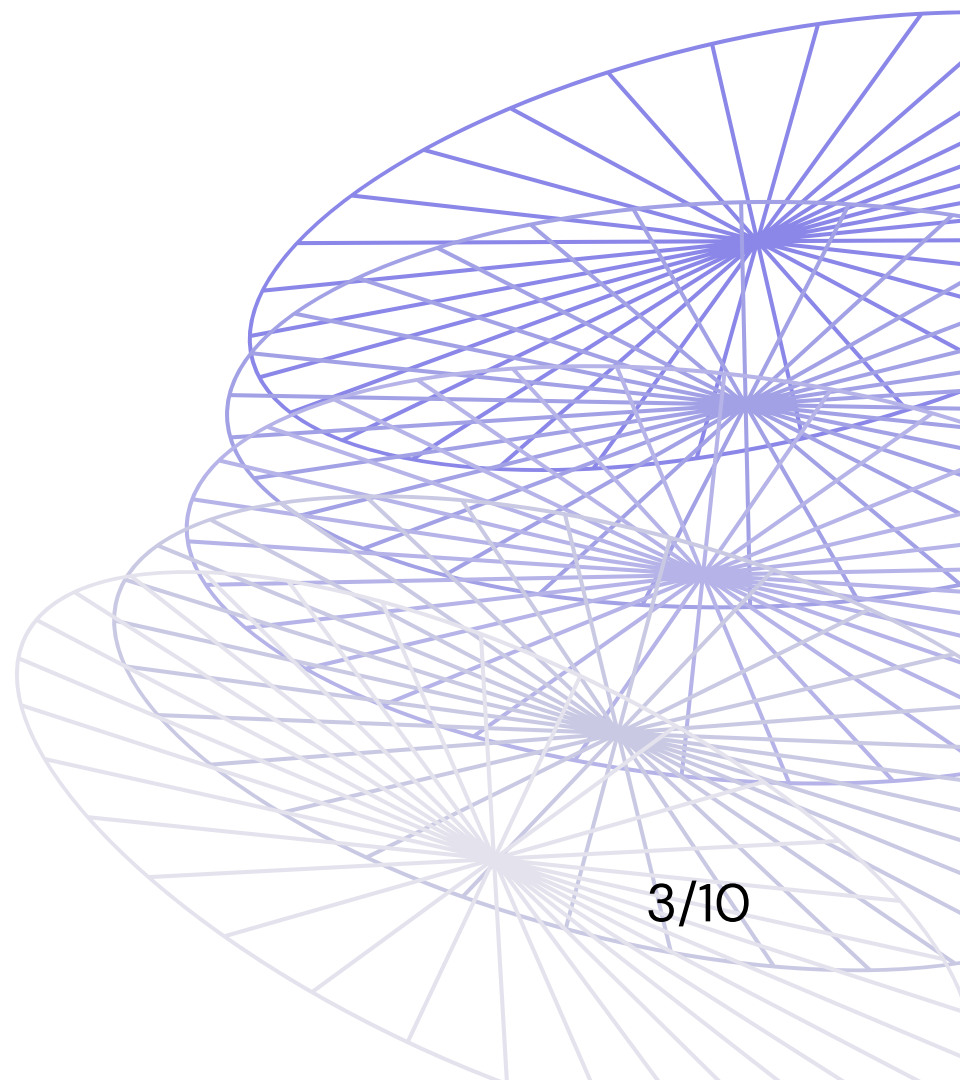
PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Pessimism about children's future is widespread among countries.

When we are pessimistic, it's hard to articulate a future where society is better off.

It's linked to a sense of lost agency and a deepening fear of the future.

Source:
<https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2018/09/18/expectations-for-the-future/>

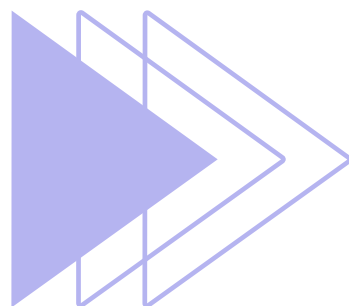
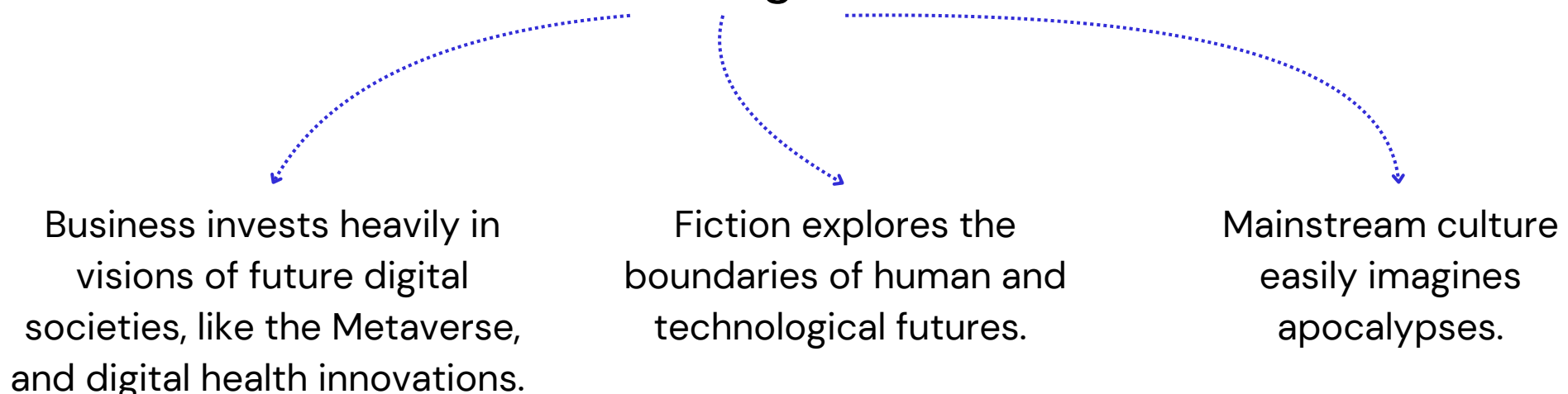


Social imagination is the capacity to envision different and improved social structures or futures beyond present reality.

It involves

- **imagining** alternative ways of organising society,
- **addressing** challenges, and
- **creating** better conditions for future generations.

Some fields excel at thinking far into the future:



However, we struggle to imagine **positive** futures.
But it doesn't have to be that way.

1. A **wide menu** of possibilities helps us thrive, especially in times of significant challenges.

#diverse_interventions
#empowerment

Just as genetic diversity drives evolution and polyculture sustains agriculture, diverse interventions are essential for shaping and adapting the future. Imagination here is not a luxury but a necessity.

2. The **status quo** can't help when challenges are ever-changing and increasingly complex.

#adaptation
#resilience

The urgency of present challenges, such as climate change, rapid ageing, inequality, and disruptive technology, requires innovative and collaborative arrangements, which should stem from our ability to imagine and design.

3. We want a world better aligned with the **broader population**, not just the elites.

#emancipation

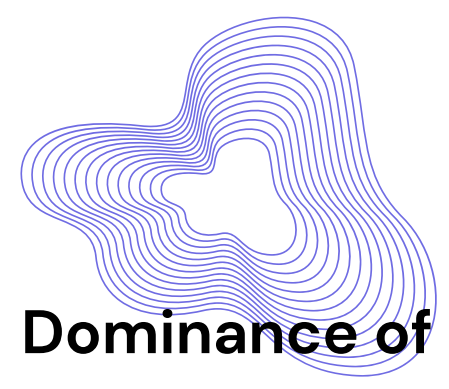
Organised social imagination is now so monopolised by the already rich and powerful, while the interests and values of the great majority are brushed aside from the picture. With social imagination, we strive for equity and inclusivity.

Why is social imagination declining?

A glance into some potential causes:



Rise of highly individualistic cultures



Dominance of rationality and science



Complexity of the world




Historical failure of utopian ideals



Shift in power & institutions



Status quo advocates



Social media echo chamber



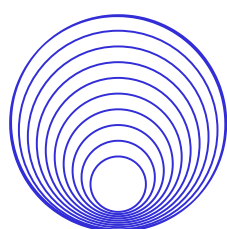
Imbalance in resources



Focus on specialisation in academia

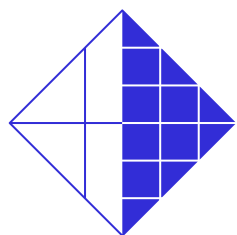


Anyone can imagine, but
impactful social imagination
requires more **dedication**.



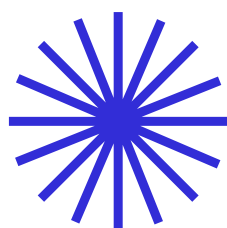
**Practice, time,
repetition, space**

It takes time, and often silence, space, and detachment from reality, to be able to conceive, design, and describe the future. This capacity can't be squeezed into one or two seminars.



Milieux

Like other creative activities, social imagination flourishes best in an environment that provides feedback, criticism, and peer interaction.



**Diversity &
inclusion**

Social imagination isn't limited to specialised thinkers or artists. We must ensure space & creative resources for social imagination are accessible to diverse voices and experiences, rather than dominated by the relatively privileged.



Wayfinding skills

Wayfinding in social imagination involves understanding and mapping paths towards possible and desirable futures both physically and conceptually.

Imagination in other fields rests on an ecosystem of funding – some philanthropic, some public, and some commercial.

We need an **equivalent** for the social field.

- **Cultivating milieux**

environments stimulating creativity, criticism, and conversation among diverse groups

- **Creating institutions with an economic base and space**

institutions having stable funding and designated physical spaces where ideas can be explored and developed

- **Cultivating imaginariums**

creative labs where people can freely gather, curate, and promote imaginative ideas

- **Spreading methods**

social imagination methods shared, guided, and reflected on by ones who master them

By doing this well, more communities can, promisingly, once again, become heroes of their own history.



Here are some ideas for building blocks of a future society, but the sky is the limit:

A new logic of Care

where care transcends sectoral silos and becomes a cornerstone of a wellbeing economy.

Democratic innovations

where collective intelligence is enhanced through novel democratic processes.

Energy just transitions

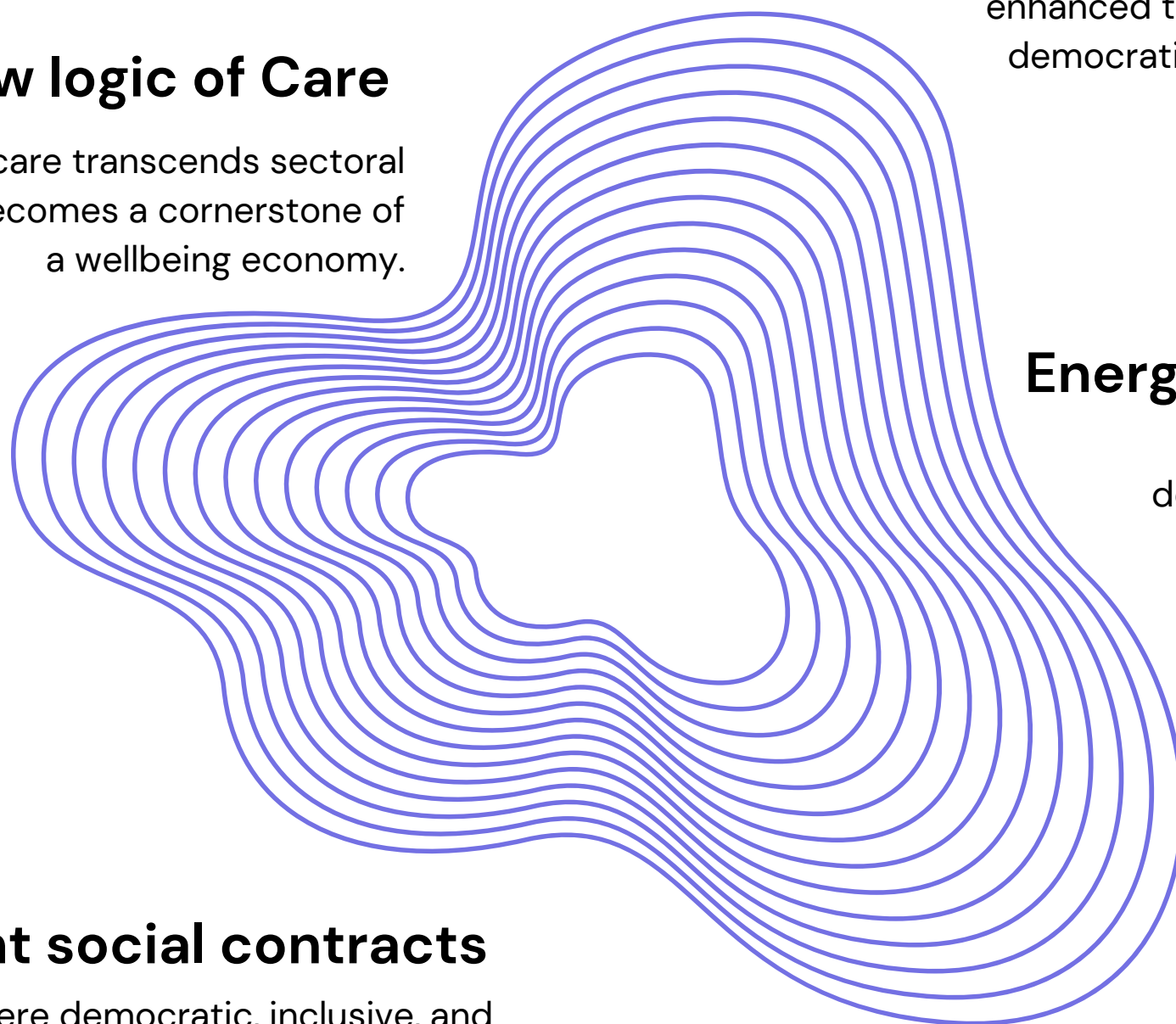
where energy systems are decentralised and integrated into building design.

Resilient social contracts

where democratic, inclusive, and open model of social contracts are cultivated.

Sustainable food systems

where human-animal relationships are reinvented, and eating habit becomes more interntional.



The importance of **social imagination** in addressing contemporary challenges and shaping future possibilities is tremendous.

Given the declining capability, we have the agency and essential tools to explore and create a better society, turning utopian ideals into the reality that **enriches us all**.

Shall we make it happen?

The paper 'The Imaginary Crisis' presents a foundational concept of Sir Geoff Mulgan's book ***Another World Is Possible***.

Read the full paper: [here](#).